

Five Top Technologies/Applications Every Genealogist Should Use

The syllabus material for this class is located at
www.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/images/d/df/TopTechs.pdf

1. CLOUD STORAGE & INTEOPERABILITY

The need for this technology for genealogists is threefold:

1. You want to be able to access your photos and documents from anywhere you're your tablet, phone, computer, or even someone else's computer (interoperability).
2. You want to share documents and photos with selected people.
3. You have so many photos and scanned documents you run out of room on your phone or tablet—or even your computer.

There are several services or applications which address some of these problems, but perhaps not all of them. These include:

- Dropbox – I have found this to be the most reliable and easy to use. It allows you to set your phone, tablet, camera, etc. to automatically upload any picture you take, then synch them with other devices. You can also get to your items stored on Dropbox from any Internet-connected device. The problem is that Dropbox stores a copy of all items on each device when synching, so it doesn't solve the memory space problem (#3, above). The space problem can be solved by paying for additional space.
- Google Drive – This works well, but takes up space on the device, just like Dropbox. It is a bit more difficult to share and I've had a few problems getting to it from other computers at a library or elsewhere and synching to other devices. The application runs in the background and seems to crash occasionally, especially when trying to shut down your device. The space problem can be solved by paying for additional space.
- OneDrive (formerly SkyDrive) is a similar service to Google Drive, but works with Microsoft accounts. I have had considerable difficulties trying to work with Microsoft account. I do not recommend this one—it is too integrated and makes invalid assumptions about what you are trying to do which are difficult to correct.
- GooglePhoto – This shows great promise, but is still in beta. I'm not sure that it will solve the space problem on the device, but has no limit on web storage space (the only one that does this). It has some real advantages and may be the solution—although sharing is still problematic.
- GoogleDocs could be adapted to solve these issues, but at present is designed for files rather than photos and scanned items.
- Mozy, Fabric, and other "backup" services lack in instant access capability, so I don't consider them in the same category.

2. SOURCE CITATION ASSISTANCE

Proper source citations are extremely important. We need to preserve when and where a record was found, when it was created, and what information came from that source. Many of us cite sources, but fail to adequately record what information came from the source. For example, what if we have a birth date recorded, but we find a record that has a different birth date. To evaluate whether the new birthdate is correct, we need to know where we got the old birth date. We look at the sources for the individual and find 17 source citations, but there is nothing to indicate which of the 17 sources gave us the birthdate we have. We have to look at all 17 in an effort to evaluate which birth date is correct. Wouldn't it be better if when we cite a source it would automatically tell us what information we used from that source? What if we got the birth year from a census record and later added the full date from the headstone, but only the census record is attached to the birth information, while the headstone is just listed as a general source for the person, not as a source for the birth date. We need a way to associate a source with the specific information gained from that source. We need a way to add reasoning which explains why we disregarded some information in a source. Notes or comments may not be the best way. This is still an area which needs improvement.

Many websites now have a way to automatically capture source information, but in a format which is often not consistent with the way another website captures source information. We need standards and we need better more exact citation and reasoning within the source citation we use.

One major tool which does some of this is Tree Connect from www.recordseek.com. Just add the bookmarklet to your browser, and it will automatically cite sources in either FamilySearch FamilyTree or Ancestry tree format.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS SHARING

As more and more people get involved in family history, there has been more and more duplication. Early efforts at sharing, including Ancestral File, Ancestry World Tree, Pedigree Resource File were attempts to share genealogy and reduce duplication. However, when one looked for others working on the same person, there was often dozens or even thousands of versions of research on the same person. Trying to find research to add to what you had often takes more time than just duplicating the research.

In the past allowing multiple people to use the same genealogy required that one person export their changes send them to the others in the group who were also editing. They then had to import these changes into their genealogy programs and match and merge the updated data with their data. Then they would export their changes and do it all over again. This process is highly inefficient and has led to a closed, uncooperative approach to computerized genealogy.

There are many current attempts to solve this sharing problem using the web. These include:

1. Post your genealogy online, but maintain control and let intelligent matching show you duplicates (Ancestry, Pedigree Resource File, GenesReunited, and more)
2. Synched databases using the web to connect to other users of the same software or even compatible different software (Ancestral Quest or other)
3. Cloud-based database (PHPGedView) - PhpGedView now allows concurrent editing of the same database right online so that everyone automatically has the latest copy of everyone else's work. There is no longer the need to export, then match and merge data.
4. Single database everyone shares (FamilySearch FamilyTree)
 - a. Way to resolve differences
 - b. Better matching

4. GEOCODING AND OTHER EMBEDDED SOURCE INFORMATION

All pictures (even of documents) can be Geocoded. All should be. You may remember where you were when a picture was taken, but those who inherit or view pictures may not.

Geocoding saves time and preserves some aspect of source info. Here are some potential benefits:

- a. Wouldn't it be nice if photos automatically told you when and where the photo was taken?
- b. Would it help if a photo could prompt a GPS system to guide you to the spot where it was taken (think headstones)?
- c. Would it be nice if the photo also contained info on who or what is in the photo?
- d. Would it help if a photo or scan of a record contained information that told you where the record is located?

The good news is that all of these are currently being done except for c. Technology is being developed which will likely make that a reality in the near future (it is possible now, but requires some manual input).

You will need to enable GPS on your smartphone, camera, tablet, or other device you are using to take picture. Make sure you enable the device, not just a single application (use device settings, not application settings). CAUTION: don't post your photos to a public site like Facebook while on vacation because that will let anyone and everyone know you are not at home. If you want to share photos with friends and relatives while you are still on vacation, post photos to a limited access site like Google Photos, photobucket, etc.

5. RESEARCH INTELLIGENCE (HINTING)

Here, the need for genealogists is a tool which finds records for your ancestor and automatically bring them forward to you. Ancestry uses what used to be called the *shaky leaf* to suggest records which might be your ancestor, and FamilySearch uses *record hinting*.

MyHeritage also has a tool for record matching. Recent tests show 98% accuracy for hints made by FamilySearch, 97% from MyHeritage, and a little over 60% from Ancestry. These can be used to add sources easily in these three online trees. I highly recommend that you use the comments box (why are you attaching this record to this person) to explain both what piece(s) of information you are using from the record and explain reasoning if there is any conflicting information from another source. Thus, you might connect a death record and note that you used the death record to add the death date, confirm the parents' names (adding the mother's maiden name), and to add the middle name of the deceased person which previously had just been an initial. Then you would explain why you changed the birth year (because the census age had been a year off since he was born in November).

Artificial intelligence is used in other tools, including the Legacy 8.0 software, FindARecord and GenSmarts. FindARecord (www.findarecord.com) should be familiar to all genealogists. It makes suggestions using artificial intelligence in 6 categories – Sources, Persons, Relationships, Problems, Cleanup, and Temple Ordinances. LDS members use it to automatically find names in their tree which have not been sent to the temple. It's a great tool which can help clean up, add to, get sources for, and provide temple work for family in your FamilyTree on FamilySearch.

RecordFinder I suggest you at least take a look at GenSmarts—it can be a great tool (see www.gensmarts.com), although some of its usefulness is being incorporated into FamilySearch and other analysis tools which make record hints.. research suggestions, and problem notifications.



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